

Land Reforms in India : The Policy Logic of the Congress Party

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LAND REFORMS IN INDIA : THE POLICY LOGIC OF THE
CONGRESS PARTY

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In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse the land reform policy mainly of the Congress Party in terms of legislation, implementation and mobilization of the intended beneficiaries. The nature of legislation and its relation to the stated goals, the instrumentalities of implementation, particularly the bureaucracy, the need for and attitude of the Congress towards active involvement of the beneficiaries in the process of land reforms are discussed to throw light on the extent to which the Congress Party has been able to implement its agrarian policy and to understand the evolution of agrarian structure in India. This is followed by a short discussion of the perspective on agrarian change and performance of the Janata Party and its differences with the Congress Party in this regard. We conclude this paper by raising the question : Are land reforms relevant any more in the present context? There is a strong and growing trend of opinion - at the political, administrative and academic levels - to suggest that land reforms are a thing of the past; what is relevant is rural development. Even the new parties

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like Janata Party and Telugu Desam are concentrating on issues other than land reforms. Yet the issue is far from resolved and land reforms have continued to be the main plank in the programmes of Left Front Governments in Kerala and West Bengal. The CPI(M) with its left allies has gained the undivided support of the landless, small peasant and tenants by making land reforms the main issue, notwithstanding some related problems it is facing. The important issue therefore is how do we understand land reforms in the context of present agrarian structure in India and the strategies of development associated with the emerging new political trends, particularly the right of centre parties in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka with no strong ideological moovings and Left Parties in Kerala, West Bengal, Tripura and elsewhere adopting both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary methods of agrarian change? However a discussion in detail, of the alternatives to Congress policy logic is not proposed here; rather it points to the alternatives proposed, particularly by the Left Parties within the existing legal and political structure.

The land problem in India is a legacy partly of the Pre-British period but mainly of the British period. The British colonial government destroyed the earlier land tenures which had ~~a bias towards~~ ^{favoured} the actual tiller and moulded the land structure to solve its interests especially regular collection of revenue by creating strong feudal vested interests in the pattern of land tenures.

Major nationalist critics of colonial policy like R.C. Dutt attributed the agricultural backwardness in India to the British

created institutional structure, i.e. the land revenue, credit and revenue systems and marketing structure. The national movement thrived on this general understanding and its social base got widened in the process of mobilisation of the agrarian population which was adversely affected by the impact of the British policies. P.C. Joshi presents the major problems that emerged in the process of British rule as : the evolution of the semi-feudal agrarian structure consequent upon the colonisation of the Indian economy, which eventually resulted in the rural-urban cleavage as a measure feature of the colonial economy; the evolution of internal agrarian class structure with three marked modes of exploitation of the direct producers through landlordism, usury and market mechanism and the attempt to solve these problems by Western models of solutions far removed from the Indian context. (Joshi, 1975:17)

On the whole during the national movement the main contradictions on the land front were between the peasantry and imperialism on the one hand and between the peasantry and feudalism on the other. Whatever legislation the colonial government enacted it did not touch these basic contradictions and became the central issue that fed the various trends in the struggle for independence.

In independent India attempts to change the feudal land structure bequeathed by the British government have been passive and aimed at striking a balance between the interests of the landed and the landless, within the framework of the fundamental right to property allowing even non-cultivating ownership in a

big scale. Such reforms, particularly those intended to smoothen the relationship between the landlord and the tenant and increasing agricultural productivity had been undertaken during the British period also.¹

POLICY AND LEGISLATION

The agrarian policy conceived in the initial stages was broad and comprehensive and was even radical from the view point of the ideology of the Congress Party. (Chattopadhyay, 1973 : 104-105; Frankel, 1978:68-69) This is evident from the reports of Committees that were appointed by the Congress Party which not only recommended abolition of unearned income on land but also conferment of security of tenure and ownership on the tenants, distribution of surplus land, consolidation of landholdings and co-operativization of agriculture. While legislation on tenancy reforms and ceiling on landholdings was being formulated after the abolition of zamindari there was a lively discussion on whether to adopt the Chinese or Russian model of co-operativization of agriculture, although the different national and socio-economic contexts, particularly the institutional factors, were overlooked.² The Second Five Year Plan proclaimed in 1956 that such steps should be taken "as will provide sound foundations for the development of co-operative farming, so that over a period of 10 years or so substantial proportion of agricultural lands are to be cultivated on co-operative lines". At about the same time an Indian delegation visited China to study co-operative farming in that country and gave a favourable report in 1957. In 1959 in its Nagpur Resolution the Congress Party declared

that future agrarian pattern should be that of co-operative farming wherein the village panchayats were to operate joint farming co-operatives and farmers were to pool their land under joint management but retain their ownership and get dividends in addition to remuneration for work done. The programme of co-operativization was to start after the implementation of the ceiling legislation and redistribution programme to vest the surplus land in panchayat co-operatives consisting of "landless labourers and small peasants" (Tai, 1974:237). Some tenancy acts included provision for co-operativization of agriculture as a follow up of implementation of tenancy laws.

But, though voluminous legislation on land reform was enacted it did not embody the objective of 'land to the tiller' and co-operativization. In the initial measures of abolition of zamindari itself, because of the wide definition of personal cultivation with allowance to non-supervision, weak or no legal obligation to the spirit of the law, some landlords could even legally keep for themselves more than what they had before the reform. As the reform was accompanied by payment of compensation based on the criterion that highest rents would be paid to those who had lowest income some of the zamindars created tenures in the names of their family members and got more compensation than what they would have otherwise been entitled to. Provision for the exemption of homefarm land encouraged them to classify lands on which they had only revenue rights as homefarm lands only. In the tenancy reforms, because of many loopholes in legislation such as provision for compensation to be paid by the

tenant, right to resumption for personal cultivation, many standing and privileged tenants who were the second layer of intermediaries but non-cultivators gained land and the actual tillers and tenants-at-will were evicted from land. As H.D. Malaviya had observed in a discussion on land situation in India, "In fact nowhere in the world have land reforms legislation been so voluminous as in India, but nowhere else were there so many loopholes left in the enactments enabling the vested interests, to defeat the spirit of law and exploit them to their own purposes". (Malaviya, 1970:70-71)

Based on various evaluation reports and individual studies Utsa Patnaik notes that land reforms have not affected greatly the patterns of land ownership in terms of operational holdings although they have affected the mode of operation in a variety of ways much against the process of transformation of land to the tiller; "while a few dozen vast estates spanning scores of villages each in every district were broken up, the reforms preserved the dominant position of the village level landlord". Whereas the petty owners with non-land sources of income could not help getting their land cultivated by disguised tenants by hired labourers, the big land owners have started taking closer interest in their land by shifting from customary rent exploitation to other forms such as cultivation by attached labourers and crop-sharers in states like Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

Indeed, writes Patnaik, as the NSS Report on Landholdings for 1953-54 revealed 39.6% of all leased in area was with big

landowners operating more than 20 acres before the tenancy reforms and a large number of unprivileged tenants leased in small holdings : the former leased in for expanding the scale of operation and the later for livelihood by paying 'hunger-tents'. While land reforms helped these rich peasants as their leased in area decreased and operated area increased after the reform. (Patnaik, 1975:239)

The programme of ceiling on land holdings, apart from the many loopholes, suffered from a big time lag between the announcement of the policy in 1953 and recommendations made in 1956 by the Central Governments which the State Governments legislated in early sixties, the state government, could also take some time for enforcement. To quote an example : The government of Rajasthan appointed a committee for recommending ceiling policy measures. The committee took two years for this and Legislation another few years and it was in 1960 only the President gave consent to the Bill. The government took three years i.e. upto 1963 to make preparations such as procedures for and fixing the date of enforcement but could not proceed because the landlords legally challenged the main provisions. Ultimately the law came into force, after the challenges of the landlords were dismissed, in 1969. Meanwhile the expected ceiling came down from 2.3 million acres to 1 million, only a little of which was to be allotted to the landless. This has been the case with many states, particularly Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and even W.Bengal wherein the expected ciling reduced drastically because of the

gap between the announcement of the policy and enforcement of legislation. Many other problems which ceiling laws in various states faced or exemptions to various categories of land including even the categories like lands under commercial concerns efficiently managed and mechanised farms. No wonder that surplus taken over by the various state governments was not more than 2 million acres, only a $1/3$ ^{cf} which was actually allotted to the landless.

Further, the central government had provided to the states only some broad guidelines in terms of the objectives of legislation and implementation and did not make it compulsory for the state government to follow certain uniform principles regarding the nature of legislation, its timing and the modus operandi of the programmes. As a result about 20 different enactments were passed in different states and union territories and the changes in land structure envisaged by them differed greatly, depending on local pressures underlying which were electoral implications for the Congress Party. This, on the whole, frustrated the objectives of the policy. Ambiguity at this level also led to problems of constitutional propriety in regard to the fundamental right to property and the need for the consent of the President for a land reform act to come into effect. On the one hand agriculture is a state subject and on the other, an act passed by a state government has to be consented to by the President. The relation between the President and the government in the Indian federal polity being what it is the Congress Government at the Centre went against such land reforms acts passed by states where

its influence would be weakened. For instance, the Congress Party did not take too kindly to the Agrarian Relations Bill passed by the Communist Government in Kerala in 1959, and withheld the assent of the President to it, although it embodied only those recommendations which were made by the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee.³ After the dissolution of the Communist Government elections took place and the Congress Party formed government which amended many radical provisions of the Agrarian Relations Bill enacted by the Communist Government although the original version of the Bill was still a 'bourgeois agrarian reforms' measure within the framework of the constitution, respecting the landowners' existing rights and providing for compensation for any land acquired by the government.

Same is the case with Left Front Governments formed in 1967 and 1969 in W.Bengal ^{where} ~~which~~ radical land reforms laws ^{were enacted} ~~within~~ ~~enacted~~ the constitutional framework but which were thoroughly modified when the Congress Government came to power. The Land Reforms Act passed by the present W.Bengal Legislative Assembly dominated by the CPI(M) has been pending with the Central Government for years for the approval of the President.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

In any programme the machinery of implementation assumes great importance. It should be unbiased and free from influence and pressures, particularly from vested interests who are likely to suffer as a result of the implementation of the programme. An alienated bureaucracy loyal to the colonial

government and the zamindars was a heavy burden on the tenants and peasants during the colonial period. The new land reform measures aimed at attacking the feudal structure which the old officials had been supporting or in whose evolution they played a prominent role. The implementation of these laws should have been assigned to an altogether new machinery. It was naive to expect that the same machinery without an external pressure would sympathise with the beneficiaries of the programme especially when the losers were still powerful and free to influence it by all means.⁴

It was wise on the part of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee to have recommended that separate Central Land Reforms Commissioners with an independent machinery of their own be established and "vested necessary powers" and be charged with the task of agrarian reforms that required a new spirit and progressive outlook. It is no exaggeration to say that such an independent organisation could have been free from local vested interests. This important recommendation was, however, neglected by the leadership. It is in this background of the suggestion of Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee that P.C. Joshi argues that "the restructuring administrative system can open a new chapter in land reforms implementation" if the process of restructuring results in tilting the balance of power in the political system in favour of the rural poor. A beginning can be made in that direction by assigning the implementation of land reform programmes to rural poor oriented commissions at the centre and the states (P.C. Joshi, 1978 : A.78-83). However, Joshi's

suggestion involves crucial political decisions, because Land Commissions with a new spirit can play a neutral role only on the basis of a wide political support, particularly from the party in power or from the organisations of the landpoor and the landless, if the practice during the United Front and Left Front Governments in Kerala and W. Bengal is any guide.

The bureaucracy at the state level in India has, contrary to the popular belief about its neutrality, strong links with society. Its links with the society in many concrete ways conditions its behaviour at every level. Drawn from the upper classes they share the ideology of the status quo and those who are likely to lose in the reform have easy access to them. This may not be the case with the theorists and planners at the central level but they are nowhere in the picture of implementation after the measures are incorporated into the plans and enactments. The state level bureaucracy, because land offers status security and privilege in the society, will see to it that land reforms are not implemented in the interests of the class of which they themselves are a part. The panel on Land Reforms appointed by the Planning Commission of the Government of India found that the zamindars of Purnea district, Bihar, had very good relations with the Revenue Officers there and that with their help they had enlarged their lands. Today the ex-zamindar are big landowners who own thousands of acres in the districts of Bhagalpur, Saharsa, Purnea, Monghyr and Gaya (Fadia, 1984:66).

The local level officials are still more conservatives. Steeped in the ideas of caste superiority and inalienability of the right to property in land. Moreover being underpaid by the department they. "do depend on the landed gentry for their sustenance associate with them for prestige; in some cases they themselves become landlords and work as agents of the landed gentry in an informal sense of the term.

Thus the national leadership by making the land reforms a non-political issue failed to enlist the support of the land poor and the landless for the purpose of implementation and for creating required political atmosphere; nor a new administrative machinery enlightened with the spirit of law was created. But in every situation to be reformed vested interests are inherent and the reform works only in that context. Not surprisingly, the state governments, with a few exceptions, made no efforts to stop abuses of the land reform laws and rarely allotted additional funds for the land reforms implementation or appointed additional staff. The same traditional village officers, 'struggling with jurisdiction extending over several villagers and on a salary of some Rs.30 to Rs.60 per month, frequently collaborated with the landowners. Higher officials were a few and were responsible for 100 to 200 villager each and they were over burdened with other responsibilities. Above all was the highly unequal legal battle between the tenant and landlord which the legal responsibility of the tenant to establish himself as a tenant led to. The whole process went on in a presumed political vacuum as the

Congress Party did not carry on any propaganda either by publishing the provisions of land reform laws or by organising the tenants to claim their rights in a way that would have prepared them psychologically for facing any retaliation from the landlords. The implementation suffered a greater deal in Jagirdari areas such as Telangana and parts of Hyderabad, U.P. and Rajasthan where the patels and patwaries, the village officers were appointed by the erstwhile Vatandars or Dasmukhs who held a number of villages the reforms. Thus land reforms in India under the Congress failed in the ideals of equity, justice and even democracy and socialism and landed in the manoeuvres of zamindars and landlords and conservative and corrupt bureaucracy.

Some related problems notwithstanding, it is only the United Front and Left Front Governments led by the Communist Parties in Kerala and West Bengal that tried to see that the officials work in line with the spirit of land reform laws and sympathise with the intended beneficiaries in all their difficulties. Progressive officials have been taking this opportunity of doing whatever could be done within the legal framework. On the other hand the associations of tenants and agricultural labourers have created a political atmosphere, balancing the pressure of the landlords (Namboodripad, 1959:26-35, Konar, 1977:4-6 Lietin, 1982 : 67-88)

POLITICAL ACTION AND MOBILISATION OF THE BENEFICIARIES

One of the factors that assumes crucial importance in the successful implementation of land reforms is political action for

mobilisation of the intended beneficiaries. This is so in the context of both evolutionary and peaceful land reforms intended to rationalise the agrarian structure with a view to preserving the overall status quo, as well as land reforms undertaken by Communist Parties and governments formed by them within the prerevolutionary or bourgeois social framework, particularly to gain massive support of the landless and landpoor so as to integrate the process of reform with the advancement of class struggle for the ultimate success of a social revolution. This is what happened in bourgeois capitalist revolutions in America and France wherein the agrarian structure has been rationalised and agriculture has been modernised so as to subserve the capitalistic production and in Communist revolutions in Russia and China wherein the land struggles were integrated with revolution and agrarian structures ^{were} ~~been~~ modernised to make them substantial bases for the socialist pattern of agricultural development.

On the other hand, successful implementation also involves some sort of control over the landed gentry so as to check their manoeuvres to thwart the reform. The losers in the reform by virtue of their position, prestige and socio-economic mobility generally react to the reform in a negative way and join counter revolutions if the objective of the reform is a revolutionary upheaval.

Historical experience in the Third World countries like Colombia, India, Iran, ^{Mexico} ~~Mexico~~, Pakistan, Israel, United Arab Republic, the Philippines, Taiwan and S.Korea has also

established that political will plays a crucial role in the land reform and determines, in the process, the relation between the promise and performance, goals and their realisation. However, the intention here in comparing the status quo and revolutionary models is not to equate the two models of land reform in this regard; rather, it is to stress the importance of political aspect in taking land reform to its logical end. This makes it possible to compare countries like India with countries which have taken up land reforms to prevent any long run threat of communist revolution (e.g. Iran and Pakistan) and countries which faced immediate threat of Communism (e.g. Philippines and Taiwan) and to understand how far the Congress Party has gone to implement its own policy of land reform and agricultural development.

The political elite in Mexico, Taiwan, the U.A.R. and Iran have shown strong political commitment by personally identifying themselves with the reform. Firstly, these elites did not represent the landed gentry and this created a line between them and the peasantry. Secondly, the political leaders in these countries with their 'resolute will and dynamic personality, with compassion for the Peasantry could energize the reform movement, provide it with spirit and dramatise its results. In doing so such a political leadership could help generate popular enthusiasm for reform and weaken landlord resistance. Cardenas in Mexico, General Chen Cheng, a close associate of Chiang Kai-Shek in Taiwan and Shah of Iran did all that was possible in their countries which included using military force. The Taiwanese

Government began to make the necessary arrangements for land reforms in January 1949; actual enforcement started in April of the same year and was concluded in September. It took only a few months to finish an unprecedented and difficult task. The monarchy of Iran under the Shah presents the most interesting case in point, the Shah's unpopularity in his later years because of his contact with the U.S. A. notwithstanding. In a typical way he said "it was no glory for me to reign over a people who are poor and probably hungry In a country where 75 per cent of its inhabitants dwell in rural areas, surely the bulk of the monarchy's responsibilities should be towards them". (Tai, 1974:279). Shah himself gave up his vast royal estates, distributed public land and severed contacts with the large landlord class in order to distribute private farms; toured the country extensively denouncing the obstructing landlords as 'arch reactionaries' arousing warm peasant response. The landlords individually or collectively expelled the peasants, destroyed their houses, damaged their irrigation canals and attempted to bribe land reform officials followed up by a murder. The government arrested many landlords : banished some from their towns; the lands of some acres confiscated: in an area where a land reform official was murdered by landlords in their drive against reform martial law was imposed and a day of national mourning was declared and the perpetrators were severely punished.⁵ Shah personally castigated the 'black reaction's and 'Pseudo-clergymen' and said "black reaction's mentality has not changed for thousand years...what kind of respect can people who exploit on their fellow men have for religion?" (Ibid:286)

Apart from personally identifying themselves with the land reform programmes the political elite in the cases of successful implementation have seen to it that the intended beneficiaries participate in the process of implementation. They have even institutionalised this participation in the form of land reforms committees, land reform commissions and publicised the land reform programme through semi-governmental agencies. General Chen of Taiwan, though an anti-communist, tried to emulate the land reforms programme of Communist China and published even communist documents related to land reforms which has troops captured.

Thus it appears that there are many possible ways to implement land reforms once a political strategy is formulated and land reform has all the potentiality of being used in communist and anti-communist strategies. Land reform acquires much more relevance in countries where the land man ratio is low. In countries under foreign rule it provided a setting for combining anti-landlords struggles with anti-imperialist national movements.

The land problem was the central issue in rallying the mass of rural population in the national movement in India led by the Congress Party. Although Communist Party emerged late it gave a new dimension to the national movement by interpreting the land question with a Marxist-Leninist Perspective. While the strategy

of Congress stressed the contradiction between the national situation and foreign domination the Communist strategy stressed contradictions between the classes within Indian Society with a class approach on the one hand and the contradiction between the national interests and foreign domination on the other.

Thus the political and economic developments in contemporary India have to be considered as a continuation of those that evolved in the national movement and also in the process of evolving and implementing certain land reforms policies even during the British rule.

M.K. Gandhi and Mobilisation of Agrarian Classes

The main theoretical source of Congress Party's understanding of agrarian change and political mobilisation of the agrarian classes was provided by Gandhi. The national movement in India acquired a mass character because of his strategy of mass mobilisation for achievement of Independence. He advanced slogans and devised tactics of struggles the spirit of which has been derived from the core of Hindu culture and the political ethos of ancient India.

9604

Gandhi's analysis of the land problem and its solution in the theoretical framework of Trusteeship was also at the root of the tactics he devised for political action on the agrarian front. Steeped in the Trusteeship theory, he found no material and objective contradiction between landownership and landlessness; between the zamindar and tenants. His principles of Satyagraha and non-violence had never allowed the tenants to put

up any violent resistance to either the Raj or the zamindars even if it were to be spontaneous. He always preached class conciliation and co-operation of the landed and the landless. Not surprisingly, this attracted landed gentry and businessmen into the national movement and his identification with the masses unlike the earlier urban and western oriented leadership earned him considerable charisma. (Moore, 1966:371). Yet, Ghandi's charisma notwithstanding, this policy was inadequate to help building a vigorous and persistent struggle against the Raj and and to provide a solution to the problem of conflicting interests on land.

We find a great difference between his subjective analysis and formulation of issues on that basis and the objective situation that obtained on the agrarian front in India. In fact the Indian National Congress had neglected the land problem in the beginning and started identifying with Kisans only when it realised that the large landed class was in union with the British. This union for a long time, kept the zamindars tied to the administration because of the administrative and political necessities of the Raj and because the zamindars performed a dual role of revenue collectors and landlords to safeguard their overlordism. The basic contradiction between the union of an alienated group of zamindars and the Raj on the one hand the peasants and tenants on the other hand was reinforced by the various sporadic outbursts of rural unrest. Although, on certain occasions, the British Raj passed Acts for the betterment of the tenants it never offended the zamindars. In fact in situations

of serious peasant revolts "the government turned to the landed aristocracy ... to provide the basis for an anti-revolutionary front". Yet, in this context, as W. Norman Writes, "Gandhiji's own attitude was no one class should benefit at the expense of another but all should unselfishly work together landlords and industrialists, peasants and workers should not that each other as enemies but practice mutual for bearance and tolerance; one should provide good living and working conditions take only a just amount in rent and pay their wages" But then under the application of this teaching neither the landlords lost anything nor the peasants gained anything.

It was clear that Gandhi did not see the strategic aspect on the land front that the colonial interests and the interests of native landlords were intertwined. Rather, he considered the colonial interests per se as distinct from the interests of the native landlords. It is understandable that his trusteeship theory failed him to see the dynamics of mutual strengthening of the colonial and native vested interests and as a result his tactics never sharpened either the contradiction between the peasantry and the Raj or the contradiction between the peasantry and the landlords (Frankel, 1977:35; Pandya, 1978:1077). This logic led Gandhi to champion the peasants case against that of the colonial Raj, but not against that of the Indian landed interests. As Abha Pandya has put it : "Gandhi treated British colonial interests as a distinctly non-Indian category and when peasant interests were adversely affected by government policies and actions. Gandhi defended peasant interests with vigour. But

when peasant were circumscribed by indigenous landed interests the congress under Gandhi counselled mutual trust and understanding and compromised continuously in favour of Indian vested interests". (Henningham, 1982) also argues that the colonial state combined with Bihar Congress, with which Gandhi was very much associated, thwarted the emergence of radical initiatives; whereas the extensive mobilisation of the peasantry shook the framework of the British rule it did not transform the social order.

But even the strategy of mobilisation of the peasantry against the British Raj and British Indigo planters was not carried out with much of vigour and Gandhi was always cautious to see that it would not politicise the tenants too much. On all occasions he unequivocally opposed consolidation and strengthening of the peasants' political solidarity against the zamindars.

Champaran and Kheda in Bihar and Gujarat respectively are the two episodes which illustrate Gandhiji's tactical logic of deliberate prevention of politicisation of the tenantry, not even for strengthening the Congress, resulted in a super imposed unity of all classes against the British Government. As far as Champaran is concerned it was a case of British Indigo planters vs the tenants. The bone of contention was the 'thinkatia' term which required the tenants to plant 1/7 of every acre of land with indigo for the landlords. At the request of an agriculturist Gandhi paid a visit to Champaran from Lucknow in connection with the annual session of the Congress. After an investigation

Gandhi was convinced that of the gross exploitative nature of Thinkatiya system and the miserable conditions of the tenants. Frankel argues that Gandhi "could have responded to the peasants' complaints by interpreting the 'thinkatiya' system and the general condition of cultivators as symbols of British exploitation, thereby converting the economic grievances of the tenants into an anti-British or pro-Congress movement. Equally plausible, given his social and economic policy, he could have challenged the legitimacy of the entire system of land relations that permitted a handful of land owners to exploit the thousands of landless tenants who worked on the farms". (Frankel 1978:36-37). But Gandhi did neither of the two things; he made all efforts to convince the British planters that they should withdraw the system. He thought that doing more than that would provoke the Government and congress would come into the picture which might lead to his arrest and the tenants would be left with their problems. This attitude gave some scope to the government which ultimately instituted an enquiry. Thousands of peasants gave testimony to their sufferings which they endured in the last hundred years. On the basis of the merits of peasants' case thinkatiya was legally abolished. This was a victory and a test for the tactic of a non-political approach to the conflicting interests of the British planters and the tenants. But Gandhi was the first to realise that it did not significantly alter the balance of social power in Champaran district or decisively change the impoverished circumstances of the villagers .

In Kheda (Gujarat) political implications were direct. The Congress organised a no-revenue campaign against the Government. There was no question of conducting a non-political campaign. But the speciality of Kheda was that the farmers works stratified in terms of their landownership or tenancy rights unlike those in Champaran where they were not a heterogeneous group involving contradictions within the peasantry. To forge a united front in Kheda was a difficult problem. The government decided attach^{to}/immovable property for non-payment of taxes which would lead to a greater loss for the large farmers. If they paid taxes the government would intimidate the small ones to follow suit. Thus in Kheda "both national and eagalitarian values demanded the subordination of class interests to common goals". Gandhi advanced his theory of trusteeship against any classbased organisation of the peasants against the government consistently. After a protracted peaceful no-tax campaign the government yielded ultimately and announced relief from the payment of revenue only in regard to the poorer cultivators. But as Gandhi said "the end was far from making me happy" as the collector retained the prerogative as to who was to be granted relief. Yet, the campaign advanced the social and national goals of the movement, as for the first time the poor cultivators developed awareness. It is true that Congress under Gandhi led no rent campaigns against the zamindars when the tenants were in distress. But, in the case of physical attacks from the side of the zamindars with the aid and assistance of the government when the tenants' resistance was likely to get out of hand he would prompt

the tenants to pay the rents. On one occasion he counselled the tenants : "let me warn you against listening to the advice if it has reached you, that you have no need to pay the zamindars any rent at all. I hope you will not listen to such advice, no matter who gives it. Congressmen cannot, we do not, seek to injure the zamindars. We aim not at the destruction of the property. We aim only at its lawful use". (Frankel, 1978: 50-51). Of course at the same time Gandhi advised the zamindersto become the trustees and trusted fiends of tenants.

Gandhi's conception of agrarian change did not lead him to advocate any rupture with existing land structure. He recommended mechanisation of agriculture in some special cases, but till the end Gandhi glorified primitive economy, and the agrarian structure and landlord-tenant relationship as it was. At times he openly declared his opposition to the abolition of Jagirdari and zamindari system which was on the agenda of the Communist Party. One such occasion was the assurance he gave to the zamindar of the United Provinces in an interview in 1934. He said : I shall be no party to dispossessing the propertied classes of their private property without just cause. My objective is to reach your heart and convert you so that you may hold all your private property in trust for your tenants and use it primarily for their welfare The Rama Rajya of my dreams ensures the rights alike of Prince and Pauper. You may be sure that I shall throw the whole weight of my influence in preventing a class war ... supposing there is an attempt to unjustly to

deprive you of your property you will find me fighting on your side. Our socialism or communism should be based on non-violence, and on the harmonious co-operation of labour and capital, the landlord and tenant".⁷

Gandhi however, modified his ideas on the future of the zamindari system though not on his concept of non-violence. While he continued to pursue zamindars to be trustees of the tenants he warned them that if the zamindars did not change they will die a natural death". In reply to a question by a socialist in 1938 he said "the main difference between your view and mine is whether the zamindari system is to be mended or ended. I say it should be mended if it cannot be mended it should end itself". By 1947 Gandhi totally modified his ideas about the process of changing the land structure. He said that "the present owners of wealth would have to make their choice between class war and voluntarily converting themselves into trustees The state would regulate their rate of commission and their children would inherit property only if they proved their fitness for it", (Pandya, 1978:1079). Abha Pandya raises a pertinent question : "were Gandhi's attempts at harmonising the conflicts between Kisans and zamindars tactical in nature, to be resolved after independence?" Later developments in the Congress Party indicate that while he did stick to his conciliation tactic he was not happy with the landed interests within the Congress, as a result of which he was slowly pushed away from the important position in the Congress politics

Pandya's imagination is rich enough but, given the continued dominance of the landed gentry in the congress and the absence of radical elements favouring the organisation of the poor peasantry independently, he would have been completely isolated even if he were to be alive. Political history of Congress Party, since the death of Gandhi till today illustrates that it has drifted away further and further from the poor peasantry.

Nehru and the Agrarian Question

As per the methods of achieving desired goals Nehru, the most dominant figure after Gandhi, believed in peaceful and non-violent path for resolving all the problem. Nehru differed from Gandhi so far as the modernisation of agriculture was concerned. As such in his land policy modernisation and scientific cultivation assumed more importance. What came in the way of modernisation and scientific cultivation in agriculture was the zamindari/Jagirdari system, the removal of which would serve both the purposes : elimination of Zamindari and Jagirdari as a political symbol of the Raj by way of assumption of state control over land; and elimination of an age old tenure to promote scientific cultivation and co-operativisation of agriculture.

With the achievement of independence the Congress Party as a political organisation did not require the massive support of the peasants and tenants. With the British gone, the Zamindari and other feudal land tenures were to be removed by legislative action requiring no political mobilisation. By 1947 radical elements, favouring the peasantry, in the Congress were out to

join All India Kisan Sabha. Nor was there any organised political resistance from the sides of the zamindars, although in some states like U.P. and Bihar they fought a legal battle. The whole process was smooth because : the legislation abolishing Zamindari provided for compensation, 'to wrap the wounds, if any, of the zamindars', by a graded system in which the lowest holder would get the highest compensation. Many Zamindars managed to get more than what was due to them by dividing their estates. Some zamindars, especially the larger ones didn't lose too much in the process of zamindari abolition. As the example of U.P. shows they were able to exercise considerable influence in the legislature, get some of the radical proposals of the U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee.

The measure was neither a reform nor a political action but one that aimed at a smooth transfer of revenue rights to the new state without needing coercion. Reform of this tenure was long overdue and in fact would secure legitimacy to the new government with no radical rupture in the agrarian structure in the agrarian structure and improve the image of the Zamindars who alienated themselves and had no sympathy of any articulate section of the Indian people because of their continued support to the British till the very end.

In the absence of any radical elements in the Congress which would have led to a serious apprehensions of their likelihood of losing much in future and zamindars had stakes in the abolition

of zamindari rather than its preservation they would get rid of the stigma of their association with the British imperialism and it would provide them a new legal status much in line with the new atmosphere. This, of course, the zamindars realised more and more in the process of implementation the reform. As Whitcombe writes, some ex-zamindars took it philosophically. "The abolition of zamindari ushers in a new era in our country" We must not give way to despair and shall adjust ourselves to new situations Kanwar Guru Narain told the U.P. Praja Party. Thus if the permanent settlement and British regulation tied them to the British Crown, abolition of zamindari tied them to Congress, its philosophy and its ideology. It was only a matter of time that they adjusted and took advantage of this tie and rebuilt their fortune by taking up new activities in commercial agriculture trading, or manufacturing or by entering politics (Whitcombe, 1980:117). Frankel writes that 'most of the largest zamindars in Uttar Pradesh adjusted very comfortably. Although the greatest Taluqdars (owning 500 squares miles or more) were often too removed from the daily operation of their estates to check the machinations of their land managers, those with middling size estates (50 to 300 villages) were not only able to retain very large farms ranging upto 2,000 acres but also used their capital for agricultural improvements that added considerably to their income. In addition, by virtue of their social prestige as leaders of local Rajput lineage, they could mobilise support of few caste members of dependent lower castes to become powerful

political figures, often shifting allegiance from one party to another for maximum leverage'.

Elections studies that have been made on social background of the Congress members have revealed that the composition of congress leaders were predominantly high-caste Hindus intellectuals, lawyers, journalists, teachers, physicians and land-owners since the 1920's till independence had changed to a predominance of landed interests after independence both at the national and state level. Tai has compiled data on the composition of the Congress party, social background of Congress Party members in Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh and also of all other parties from various sources. He has shown that even those who reported themselves as non-agriculturists had their main source of income in land and tended to favour the landed interests in any law making. At the national level the non-landed interests were in a commanding position in the first two decades after independence (Weiner, 1969:836; Tai, 1974:95:97). Relevant Data are given in Tables 1 and 2. Studies made on subsequent elections have shown that congress party's rural base, in South as well as North, consisted of landlords and rich peasants. (Winer, 1962, 1969; Ladejinsky, 1972; Hero, 1976; Kaushik, 1982). Ladejinsky writes: "The rich and well to do farm groups in India count very much in the inner councils of Congress Party both in the centre and the states, especially on election day ... though their number is small, their influence is widespread through the control of local seats of power

and much else. The so called vote banks are still controlled by them as illustrated by the fact that in the Punjab Assembly, 45 out of the 64 members are rated as big owners, in Haryana the respective members are 30 out of 52, and in Madhya Pradesh 96 out of 220". (Ladojinsky, 1972 : A.129).

Table 1 : Proportion of Lawyers and Agriculturists in the Congress Party and in the Lok Sabha, India

Leadership Groups	Year ^a	Occupational Groups					
		Lawyers		Agriculturists		All Occupations	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
Congress Party	1919	104	64.6	7	4.4	160	100
	1921	83	50.9	4	2.5	163	100
	1923	72	21.3	5	1.5	338	100
	1956	108	16.9	71	11.1	639	100
MPs ^b	1952	130	38.3	62	18.3	339	100
	1957	52	23.3	54	24.2	324	100
	1962	90	26.4	93	27.2	357	100
	1967		22.2		36.8	N.A.	N.A.
U.P. MLAs ^c	1952	86	22.1	151	38.8	390	100
	1957	49	17.1	108	37.8	286	100
	1962	39	15.7	105	42.2	249	100
Lok Sabha (All parties)	1950		32.0		6.4	313	100
	1952		35.6		22.4	N.A.	N.A.
	1957		30.3		29.1	N.A.	N.A.
	1962		24.5		27.4	N.A.	N.A.
	1967		17.5		31.1	N.A.	N.A.

Source : TAI, 1974:95

a) Refers to the year of election

b) MPs of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha,

c) Congress Members of MLAs in U.P.

Table 2 : Congress Party Representation in the Lok Sabha, 1960

Occupation	Congress Party MPs		Main Source of Income						
	No.	%	Owned Land	Land	%	Business	Profession	Other	Unknown
Agriculture	54	21.1	53	48	3	1	-	2	-
Business	25	11.2	17	4	-	18	-	3	-
Law	52	23.2	36	14	12	2	20	4	-
<u>Profession</u>	16	7.1	10	1	7	2	6	-	-
Public Work	63	28.1	35	25	26	4	2	2	4
Other	13	5.8	6	3	6	-	2	2	-
Unknown	1	0.4	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	224	100	157 (70.1%)	95 (42.4%)	54 (24.2%)	27 (12.1%)	30 (13.4%)	13 (5.8%)	5 (2.2%)

Source : Tai, 1974:96

At the grassroots level also political power is still concentrated in the hands of the rich peasantry who invariably, belong to the high castes. Introduction of Panchayat Raj and democratic institutions has not changed the socio-economic background of the leaders at the grassroot level. A study by D.S. Choudhary on the socio-economic background of the village panchayat leaders in a few villages of Rajasthan after the introduction of Panchayat Raj in 1953 has found that the leaders in the village are most cases rich peasants and landlords. Though there was some change after the introduction of panchayat raj institutions this change could be due to the impact of land reforms. (Table 3)

In his study Choudhary found that though a large number of leaders (36.22%) in Pre-Panchayat Raj period held more than 30 acres only 2.27% of them were found to be in this category after the introduction of Panchayat Raj. However, in view of the average holding in Rajasthan which is 10 acres even the leaders of Post-Panchayat Raj period could be considered rich, because 23.86% owned between 11 and 15 acres, 30.86% between 16 and 20 acres and 23.87% owned between 21 and 30 acres. Thus over 80 per cent of the leaders owned more than 10 acres.

Further more, Choudhar contends, small holders i.e. the 5 to 10 and 11 to 15 acre classes are also rich because of their other occupation such as business. Moreover, the leaders elected on the basis of reservation are also from the landed class.

Choudhary also reports that a large proportion of the leaders in Pre-Panchayat Raj (46.55%) and Post-Panchayati Raj (29.54%) periods were agriculturists, but a significant number of them in Pre-Panchayati Raj (32.75%) and Post-Panchayat Raj (19.31%) had both agriculture and business as their sources of income. (See Table 4)

Table 3 : Landholding Pattern of Panchayat Leaders in Rajasthan

Size of Land holdings in Acres	Pre-Panchayat Raj	Post-Panchayat Raj	Total
5-10	NA	17 (19.32)	17 (11.64)
11-15	8 (13.79)	21 (23.86)	29 (19.86)
16-20	3 (5.17)	27 (30.63)	30 (20.55)
21-25	11 (18.96)	12 (13.64)	23 (15.75)
26-30	15 (25.85)	8 (10.23)	23 (16.44)
31-40	17 (29.32)	2 (2.27)	19 (13.02)
Above 50	4 (6.90)	NA	4 (2.70)
Total	58 (100.00)	87 (100.00)	145 (100.00)

Source : Choudhary, 1981:57

Table 4 : State of Occupation of the Leaders

Occupation	Pre-Panchayati Raj	Post-Panchayati Raj	Total
Agriculture	27 (46.55)	26 (29.54)	53 (36.30)
Business	3 (5.17)	21 (23.86)	24 (16.43)
Agriculture and Business Both	19 (32.75)	17 (19.31)	36 (24.65)
Others including weaning, carpentering, cobbling, Jajmani etc.	9 (15.51)	24 (27.27)	33 (22.60)
Total	58 (100.00)	88 (100.00)	146 (100.00)

Source : Choudhary, 1981:59

The study thus points to the rich peasantry as the vital base of the Congress Party at grassroots level. One limitation of Chaudhary is that he has not taken into account the operational holdings or rather the total extent of land which comes under the control of the leaders he covered for the survey. It is possible that if the extent of operational holdings is taken the picture would point to the existence of the rich peasantry much more positively.

We feel that the situation would not be much too different in other states in view of the fact that the pattern of agrarian structure and the nature of the land reform legislation has similar features. Thus the policy logic of Congress meant a reform from above with an implicit belief that and reforms mobilise the ex-zamindars and make them conscious of their responsibilities and make their role more participatory and democratic. Tenancy reforms came in the second phase for the people below after making the rights of zamindari and agirdari on land inheritable and inalienable, intervestingly, by way of the abolition of these tenures itself. So much so that whatever the people below had to expect through the implementation of tenancy laws could seem to be illegal and against the fundamental inheritable and inalienable rights of the ex-zamindars, except by state mediation. But even here the actual tillers were far off. Whatever redistributive potentiality that tenancy laws had, it benefited the privileged and occupancy tenants thus making them also, like ex-zamindars, economically articulate. The ultimate sanction of

the tenancy laws being legal and the decisions of the courts being taken as final only the occupancy tenants could win the legal battles effectively. For the various layers of unprivileged tenants who actually worked on the land getting the land remained only a hope. In fact the assumed legality and formality of land reforms on the one hand and lack of any effort on the part of the Congress Party to mobilise these people enabling them to claim their rights, only politically weakened these people while the already socially and politically articulate sections of the peasantry were given push by the implicit favouritism in the laws and the logic of conciliation between the privileged and the unprivileged.

This apart events, such as the suppression of Telangana armed struggle of the peasantry in the erstwhile Hyderabad state and the removal of the first communist ministry (1957-59) in Kerala in 1959 are important and illustrate the political bias of Congress Party against the peasantry behind the assumed legal and constitutional nature of the land reforms policy. While the suppression of the armed struggle of the peasantry against the autocracy of Nizam was making strides and removing it lock, stock and barrel the police action undertaken by the Union Government under Nehru and Patel and the follow up of symbolic abolition of Jagirdari operationalised the Congress ideology of land reforms. While the ex-Jagirdars lost the patronage of Nizam Congress came to their rescue and put them in a comfortable position on par with the ex-zamindars and also made them participate in the democratic process and play their role in

the independent nation and the process of national integration. Thus behind the facade of national integration the police action obstructed the process of revolutionary land reforms and created a political atmosphere conducive to the implementation of evolutionary, conciliatory and peaceful land reforms of Congress.

The Kerala event is much more glaringly illustrative (Lietin, 1982). It has something to say not only about the congress ideology but also about the new parliamentary course of peaceful revolution adopted by the then Communist Party. The communist ministry attempted a sort of obstruction of the manoeuvres of the expected losers in the reform and mobilisation of the expected beneficiaries by way of a Marxist class approach to the problem. It passed an ordinance just within 24 hours of its coming to power banning all evictions of tenants; intervened in the bureaucratic approach to land reforms and maintenance of records, encouraged peasant movements for occupying the lands and controlled the police making them a neutral agency. It enacted radical land reforms i.e. the Agrarian Reforms Bill, very much within the spirit of the recommendations of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee and sent it for the consent of the President. However, much before that, vested interests started organising against the state government, held demonstrations, led processions and waged what is generally called Liberation Struggle. They also sent representations to the Central Government for ousting the the State Government and imposing President's rule in the name of law and order. President's rule was imposed

a few days after the receipt of the Agrarian Reforms Bill for Presidential consent. Thus the Kerala event is an illuminating example, both for the Congress and Communists operationalising the policy logic of congress land reforms on the one hand and the obstructing the process radical land reforms by Congress. The Communist Party (the Left wing) got a chance again to do something about land reforms only in 1969 when it formed a United Front Government. In the meantime the Congress Government had thoroughly amended the Agrarian Reforms Bill. The time gap between the legislation and its implementation gave the landlords enough scope to readjust their holdings to make the impending laws ineffective. The two events in Telangana and Kerala suggest that the Congress Party will oppose radical land reforms, whether they are undertaken by the peasants themselves by violent means or whether they are undertaken by parties wedded to peaceful and parliamentary means. The treatment meted to the United Front Government, in West Bengal in 1967 and 1969 only confirmed this attitude on the part of Congress Party.

Indira Gandhi and the Rise of Rich Peasant Lobby

Indira Gandhi who dominated the national scene as the leader of Congress Party after the death of Nehru made no innovations in regard to the policy of mobilisation of the deprived agrarian classes for effective implementation of land reforms. She confined herself to the legal, bureaucratic and elitist methods in formulating and implementing land policies and felt that even state governments formed by other parties should also adopt the

same methods and also meted harsh treatment to those forces who adapted extra-parliamentary methods of struggle and organisation of the peasantry. It is during her period that many peasant uprisings took place in the country viz., Naxalbari Movement in W.Bengal, Sri Kakula^m Movement in A.P. land grab movement of C.P.I (1969) and C.P.M. in many states.

In early seventies agrarian unrest started spreading to other states like Bihar, U.P. and Rajasthan with proliferation of extremist groups led by various Marxist Leninist Parties with redistribution of land among the peasantry as the main plank of their programme of Agrarian Revolution. The crisis acquired new dimensions with the peasants under the leadership of Marxist Leninist parties taking up arms in the above struggles.

It is against this background that the Congress Party leadership established a Central Land Reforms Committee in 1970. This had been suggested by the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee (1949). The Central Land Reforms Committee in its report (1972) noted with serious concern that landlessness was increasing, exacerbated by technological change that accentuated income differentials and recommended a ceiling of 10-18 acres of perennially irrigated land; but it left the decision on that to the states.

Later, the draft Fifth Five Year Planⁿ suggestively mentioned that the major obstacles in the implementation of land reforms were of a political nature : absence of strong peasants organisations, corrupt local officials and the absence of unambiguous,

firm and dynamic political direction. Like the Central Land Reforms Committee, earlier it also recommended, the formation of village and block level committees of tenants, and landless agricultural labourers and conducting mass campaigns, but it recognised that mass organisations cannot be created by legislative provisions or executive orders.

The political possibilities of such recommendations being implemented came for discussion in the Chief Ministers' conference presided over by the Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi in Sep. 1970. The Chief Ministers' conference on land reforms brought to the fore, on the one hand the political attitudes of Chief Ministers towards land reform and on the other hand the inability of the Prime Minister to act firmly on her own, inspite of the fact that she was in favour of some sort of radical land reform, having understood the causes for rural tensions which had been feeding the Left Parties. She referred keenly to the cases of Mexico, Japan and Iran where the land reforms had successfully been implemented and agricultural growth and prosperity achieved and cases of Austro-Hungarian Empire and tzarist Russia which did not care to implement land reforms successfully and as a result collapsed. Understandably, she was indicating the intensity and vigour with which a programme had to be undertaken afresh in India. As for suppressing the resistance of the losers in the reform she seemed to favour measures that were taken in Iran and the way the difficulties were overcome in Mexico. The Shah of Iran was committed to the reform and prepared to implement it

at any cost; the Minister for Agriculture Arsanjani (1961-63) warned landlords: "Divide your land or face revolution or death". (Tai, 1974:280). Arsanjani managed to purchase and distribute, a total of 8042 villages within a period of 18 months. The stiff resistance of the landlords was ruthlessly suppressed by all means as discussed in the beginning of this section.

The way in which the leadership in Mexico overcame the difficulties is suggestive of the possible means by which various difficulties like estimates of ownership and operational holdings, compensation, categorisation of various soils in various regions and prohibitive administrative costs in countries like India can be overcome. In Mexico, campesinos (peasants) could obtain land through three alternatives: restitution, dotacion and ampliacion, that is, (Restoration of land to original landowner; grant of land; enlarging the beneficiary's grant of land by additional grant). They could either, with proof of the title, recover their land from large holdings located within a seven-kilometre radius of the village in which they lived; they could get land by a fresh grant; or they could expand the area of land they received under the two previous procedures through additional grants by the government. In all cases, the government provided the land enblock, without having to award individual titles. With four fifths of Mexico's redistributed land coming through dotacion the government could launch the reform programme without being bogged down in a detailed land survey.

In Iran, the landlord was simply allowed to retain one 'village while incumbent cultivators obtained the rest of the land they had been working on

"To deal with the shortage of public funds, Mexico made extremely limited compensation payments to landlords, while practically confiscating the estates of all the rest..... In Iran the government reallocated its budget, diverting to the Land Reforms organisation a substantial portion of the oil income originally assigned to the Plan Organisation for economic development"(Ibid, 1974 : 282-83). The cases of Mexico and Iran are presented, at the risk of a slight diversion, to illustrate how episodically land reforms could be accomplished even in the context of a 'status quo' model and also to explore the intention of Indira Gandhi in referring to these cases and that of Japan in the Chief Minister's conference on land reforms. The Chief Ministers, however, were hardly impressed by these arguments. Not only did they put up stiff resistance to the proposal of a new land reform programme but claimed that abolition of intermediaries itself brought 20 million tenants into direct contact with the state after which the ceiling laws were implemented and those who did not benefit through the abolition of intermediaries were covered under the ceiling laws. Thus they paid no attention to the failure of ceiling laws and the widespreading rural unrest but instead pointed to the necessity, as conceived by them, of giving adequate support to the farmers and landowners by way of credit and other inputs to increase production. Moreover,

they suggested to the Prime Minister that the rural unrest was engineered by 'professional agitators' and should not influence the policy of the government. The Prime Minister on the other hand tried to convince them saying that "political parties may organise, even exploit, rural discontent but they do not create it. The time has now come to face the facts".

It was clear that Mrs Gandhi was circumscribed by the Chief Ministers who represented the landed gentry in the country side; that she could not do any thing drastic in regard to land reforms which would attack the interests of the rural oligarchy as easily as she got privy purses abolished or the banking system nationalised.

On the other hand the mass base of the party was so weak that she did not think of bypassing the state leaders to make a strong appeal to the masses through party cadres and organisational units at the local level. Efforts which were initiated in this direction ended in the realisation that electoral victory did not reflect corresponding organisational strength at all levels. The upsurge of mass enthusiasm for the leadership of Mrs. Gandhi was based on the hopes created by the populist slogans on which Mrs. Gandhi depended for maintaining her personal image of commitment to socialism, on the one hand, and some progressive measures such as bank nationalisation and abolition of privy purses, which did not touch the agrarian structure in any way, on the other.

But one thing about her commitment to land reforms is very clear. All the vigour with which she struggled with the conservative elements in the party, undertook progressive measures including constitutional amendments for diluting the content of fundamental right to property for implementing radical land reforms did not shake the power structure at the state, district and taluq levels, not to speak of the villages at all. Put bluntly all these moves had nothing to do with effective mobilization of the peasantry for radical land reforms and changes in the agrarian structure. While she was committed to some reform, her dependence on the landowners represented by state leaders became indispensable for electoral victory and continuance in power. What she expected, it appears, was that the progressive measures she took and an effective bureaucratic action would neutralise the big landowners. And this saved her from taking any hard political decisions like abandoning the alliance with big land owners or creating an alternative peasant base by way of starting a mass campaign against the big land owners. She did not consider them to be so powerful as to obstruct the formulation and implementation of special programmes for the landless, landpoor sheduled castes and scheduled tribes involving redistribution of land within the framework of legislative provisions enacted by various state governments.

Whatever it is, one thing may be safely said that Mrs. Gandhi's political action involved a compromise in regard to land reforms. She had not been so resolute in this regard as in the issue of Bangladesh, abolition of Privy Purses, nationalisation of Banks,

implementation of forcible Family Planning and many other issues. Emergency was prompted by the serious considerations of her political sustenance in which she could deal with the growing mass pressure organised by the various movements, particularly the one organised by Jaya Prakash Narayan and his followers rather than any consideration of controlling or checking the landowners in the implementation of any cherished programme for the welfare of the rural poor. In fact there was no section in which was held out as the main obstacle in the upliftment of the rural poor which could be made as the target of attack; as such there was need for mobilisation of the rural poor or mobilisation of the socially and economically powerful landlords.

The foregoing discussion about land reforms in India, especially during the Seventies, clearly points to one thing. The Congress Party, under the leadership of Mrs. Gandhi was not quite willing to join issue with the landed interests in order to push through the land reforms programme. At every stage it compromised with these interests which ultimately jeopardised the achievement of land reforms to which the party was acquainted, at least in principle. The resoluteness which the party had shown on other issues, e.g. bank nationalisation, abolition of privy purse and clamping emergency etc. was clearly lacking in the case of land reforms. The main reason was the Congress Party's unwillingness to antagonise the landed interests on which it ultimately depended, especially at the state, district and lower levels, for political and electoral support. Successful land reforms would

have meant mobilising the small peasantry and the landless ~~amongst~~ ^{against} the large land owners. The party was politically not in a position to adopt this course of action.

The official report of the Task Force on Agrarian Relations under the chairmanship of F.S. Appu embodied this political impasse and also the compromise with the existing socio-economic structure in the rural areas contingent ⁱⁿ the impasse. The Task Force clearly pointed out that "in the context of socio-economic conditions prevailing in the rural areas of the country, no tangible progress can be expected in the field of land reforms in the absence of the requisite political will Considering the character of the political power structure obtaining in the country it was natural that the required political will was not coming forth". About the philosophy on which this political power structure is based and the constitution which embodies it, the task force said : "In a society in which the entire weight of civil and criminal laws, judicial pronouncements and precedents administrative tradition and practice is thrown on the side of the existing social order based on the inviolability of private property an isolated law aimed at the restructuring of property relations in the rural areas has hardly any chance of success".

However, on the otherhand because the Task Force was expected to formulate principles that could be followed within the given circumstances. The Task Force felt that whereas land to the tiller meant all land should go to those who perform various operations like ploughing, sowing and transplantation yet it found

itself inclined to think that in the context of the social economic and political conditions prevailing in the country such a law will not be enacted and if enacted will not be implemented". Hence the recommendation that "the aim has to be far more modest - not land to the tiller, but reduction in the "incidence of absentee ownership of land". It is well known that it is the definition of personal cultivation that was a major factor in the "systematic and large scale ejection of tenants".

Rural Development Without Land Reforms

The present thrust is on the reinforced implementation of rural development programmes which, unlike land reforms, do not involve any controversy such as political mobilization, legal hurdles, constitutional changes or a committed judiciary. They don't have anything to do with the emerging agrarian structure so as to embarrass the rural rich. In fact historically the nature of rural development and community development programmes since the very beginning, did not envisage any mobilisation of rural poor for a basic change. As Daniel Thorner writes, whereas the the various land reform programmes were initiated against a political background of national movement, against the foreign rule and peasant movements, particularly in Telengana, Tanjore, North Bengal, Punjab community development programmes came rather quietly. Most of the projects were initiated by Indians and foreigners and were based on humanitarian and philanthropic grounds rather than any theory and practice aiming at bringing about basic structural change in the rural areas. (Thorner, 1981 : 117). Yet, as Desai writes even in the early fifties various

instrumentalities like, Panchayat Raj institutions, Mahila Mandals, youth organisations have served the purpose of involving the beneficiaries in rural development programmes. Strategies for mobilising the people for effective participation in rural development programmes have figured in the recommendations of various plans especially after the Sixties in the wake of increasing differentiation between the rural rich and rural poor inspite of plans. The Fifth and Sixth plans specially highlighted the importance of the active participation of the beneficiaries in the rural development programmes. In this context what is more important to consider is the nature of the participation and the net effect of this participation of intended beneficiaries in the rural development programmes. (Desai, 1981).

Various studies on the impact of rural development programmes on the agrarian population, have shown how various agencies for rural development have been manipulated and controlled by the emerging rural rich, which itself is a result of the planning process. As such in the context of the agrarian structure, notes Desai, these very "institutions became the additional instruments in the hands of the emerging proprietary classes in rural areas to utilize, divide, control and repress the rural poor. Actually the apathy and protest from the rural poor were also a result of the consequences of effective operation of these associations in favour of rich". In this context it will be worthwhile to examine to what extent the Communist led governments in W. Bengal and Kerala have obstructed the process favouring rural rich, how they

evolved alternative strategies of effective mobilization of the rural poor and how they have utilized the various instrumentalities like Panchyat Raj, Mahila Mandals, youth club and various voluntary organisations for the benefit and welfare of the rural poor.

In recent years the process acquired international dimensions in all respects. The government has gone for aid and advice in a big way from the international agencies for formulating and implementing rural development programmes revealing, thereby, that it is not bent upon touching the rural rich either by cutting their assets to size or by taxing them. Rural poverty could be alleviated by borrowing finances from outside. Brara (1983) gives an account of the various aspects of the political economy of present day strategies of rural development programmes, particularly the way financial aid and policy advice come from international agencies i.e. World Bank, ILO, FAO, ESCAP and ADB. It is but natural that these agencies insist upon, directly or indirectly, adopting their strategy and developmental models.

While the World Bank suggested the redirection of the investment towards target groups to increase their purchasing power this was to be done by way of changing the composition demand production and employment, rather than a prior redistribution of assets to effect basic structural change and create conditions of equitable access. Whereas the suggestion of PAO for equitable redistribution of land held good and was a departure from the conventional approach it did not involve any

new thrust in terms of any deliberate political decisions for radical change. Brara argues that developmental models propagated by international agencies are misleading and "the importance of the redistribution of assets as a prerequisite rather than its possibility as a consequence is evident. Primarily this implies a need for land redistribution, since the problems of power and access in rural areas are directly related to the size of holdings". But, while Brara argues that agrarian reforms, the prior redistribution of land as a precondition for meaningful rural development (Ibid; 338) and poverty alleviation, a government that basically represents and is controlled by the same dominant classes cannot succeed in carrying a power restructuring measure like land reform. Alternatives which he proposes are : a committed executive tolerating and responding to and even encouraging mass movements; a wider recognition of voluntary and group actions. But it is argued here that Brara's propositions are doubtful of giving fruitful results. While his practical suggestions indicate some difference of approach from the existing practice in India he does not go beyond the dominant models of development in terms of political and theoretical implications; a contradiction is contingent in such a proposition.

Even during the emergency Mrs. Gandhi depended very much on the Chief Ministers and their cabinet colleagues in the states and tried to exhort them to implement land reforms with a redoubled zeal by adopting adhoc measures. In a crucial meeting of the Chief Ministers in March, 1976 concerned mainly to discuss land

reforms it came out that even during the emergency not much was done in regard to land reforms under the Twenty Point Programme. While the Chief Ministers mentioned legal bottlenecks and administrative obstacles as the causes for the slow progress of land reforms during the emergency the Ministry of Agriculture be moaned that it was not legal bottlenecks but the absence of political will which had prevented the enforcement of measures of land reforms. This points to the fact that even during the emergency those who possessed land above the ceiling could not be touched. Though the emergency was full of excesses the landlords, were definitely not its victims.

The discussion in the foregoing pages illustrates that whatever organisational structure that evolved during the emergency for implementing land reforms did not give any impetus to the political mobilization of the peasantry. On the other hand the elections, which followed the lifting of the emergency, showed that the peasantry also voted against the Congress Party except in states like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to some extent, where the distribution of land took place and emergency excesses did not affect the peasantry directly.

After a brief interlude of Janata Government, which, created some expectations by way of the symbol of the party, criticism of the Congress for poor having gone back on Gandhian principles, and also creating land reforms commission for making suitable recommendations in regard to land reforms, but having fallen before it could implement the recommendations the Congress Party under Mrs. Gandhi came back to power. There has been no change

in the strategy of the Congress in regard to the rural poor particularly the landless and the landpoor. On the contrary the programmes for intensive cultivation, subsidized inputs to the small farmers and special programmes for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been reinforced. Mrs. Gandhi's and her party's restoration to power served a number of purposes in clearing off many controversies within the Congress: first of all it legitimized the emergency in retrospect, created an illusion of socialism embedded in Congress(I) policies and undertook some symbolic political actions with a socialistic rhetoric.

The restoration of Congress showed that the policy logic of Congress in regard to land reforms would continue. It reinforced the attitude of the big landowners that land reforms are a thing of the past and what is necessary is a multiple programme of promotion of high production, ensuring remunerative prices for farm produce and introducing crop insurance.

The question that this leads to is why a leadership which compromises with the landed class is voted into power, especially when the landed interests constitute a small section of the society. The answer to this question has something to do with the political strategy and practice of a particular governing elite which takes on a dual role: as the guardian of the class of haves in reality on the one hand and as a crusader for the rights of the poor and downtrodden, though only symbolically. On the other, while the Janata regime, apart from its inherent lack

political stability, was not able to play this dual role effectively. For one reason or the other it did not indulge socialist rhetoric or create socialist illusions. It appears that for preserving the disparity between the reality and illusion in a class society an effective mediating agency which is apparently neutral to the various classes is but a necessity.

Hence the need for programmes for the poor and downtrodden in terms of employment, health, education or providing minimum source of income which are no less attractive. There is a consensus among the ruling elite at all levels that implementation of the programmes for the rural poor in the manner of giving alms should co-exist with programmes for the rich. Which involves no political mobilisation and ideological conscientization but smooth and quite peaceful methods imparting the knowledge of this programmes through the most advanced media of communication to which extension T.V. facility is adding more and more sophistication. Whether the promises made in the programmes are real or illusiory; whether the implementation is effective or not even if the net effect is further differentiation between the rich and the poor, is quite another question. As David Selbourne writes "illusion is a crucial element in a class society which is held together not merely by repression but mechanisms which disguise its basic nature and the greater the cruelty of inequality, the greater the degree of exploitation and human misery, the greater the need for falsehood to permeate

the world which the citizens of a polity experience. So that in a society such as India's, the gross nature of illusions which govern it play no less functional a role than do the battalions of armed police which have been created to defend the interests of the ruling class in the thirty years of Indian "democracy" the "world's largest" - since "Independence" (Selbourne, 1979 : 29).

CONCLUSION

The main concern of this paper has been to examine the problems of land reforms policy of Congress in the last few decades. Although the policy itself seemed to be radical and was in line with the spirit of the national movement and goals of equity and productivity on the land, legislation for zamindari abolition encouraged the zamindars to retain a major part of their assets thus leaving no scope for a radical transformation in the agrarian structure. Within this limited scope subsequent measures aiming at benefitting the tenants did not provide any tangible gains to the rural poor - tenants-at-mill and other underprivileged groups. Because of the many loopholes and legal complexity, only the articulate section of the tenants - the rich, the privileged and occupancy tenants on the whole could take advantage of the tenancy laws. The legislation for ceiling on land on landholdings also met the same fate because of exemptions for some categories of lands depending on the specificities of the states and regions. Added to this is the flaw of fixing the ceiling on individual holding, low ceiling and

lack of provisions in the legislation for taking severe action against the evaders and benami landholders.

The machinery of implementation has been crucial in the failure of land reform measures. We argued that this, apart from other reasons, was mainly due to the continuance of the more or less the same old bureaucracy, both in terms of organisation and ideology. As a result the bureaucracy co-operated with the landed rather than the landless and landpoor. Another crucial factor is the lack of compulsory supervision by the centre to check the lethargy, deliberate or otherwise, on the part of the leadership of the states in implementing land reforms.

Still more crucial has been the factor of mobilisation of intended beneficiary classes and also checking the manoeuvres of the losers for providing a conducive atmosphere for the implementation of land reforms. While tracing the strategies of mobilization of agrarian classes followed by the Congress Party under the leadership Gandhi during the anti-imperialist struggle we argued that though the strategy of Gandhi had the potential for securing a mass base among the peasantry for the national movement, yet it was unable to focus on the basic contradictions on the agrarian front i.e. the contradiction between the alliance of the native landed gentry and the British interests on the one hand and the interests of the peasantry on the other. With the emergence of Nehru as the prominent figure in the Congress and the changing composition of Congress Party brought about by the departure of radical elements the need to mobilise the poor

peasantry was relegated into the background and issues of productivity, modernity and legislative measures assumed more and more importance. It is in the context of this political atmosphere that major policies of land reforms and co-operative farming were formulated and implemented till the death of Nehru.

The repercussions of the failure of land reforms were clearly felt during Mrs. Gandhi's regime. The agrarian crisis took a serious turn in the late Sixties manifesting itself in the form of struggles of the peasantry and land grab movements so much so that the leadership of some movements aimed at creating revolutionary bases. The efforts of Mrs. Gandhi to make a dent into the problem failed because within the party, she found herself circumscribed by the Chief Ministers and other party leaders representing the interests of the rural rich and the landlords. She could not think of an alternative to the then obtaining leadership and other agencies of mobilization of the landless in the countryside because that would tell upon her own existence and the continuance of the party in power.

In the subsequent policy decisions about land reforms, particularly Fifth and Sixth plans recommended the participation of the beneficiaries of land reforms in the implementation process, but not much was done from the side of the party as the instrumentalities for ensuring the participation were not specified. Even during the emergency the much talked about land reforms did not yield much although the intention to do something

drastic about land reforms - particularly to destroy the feudalistic influence of the landed gentry but allowing the small landlords to continue to enjoy their privileges - as was done in Iran and Mexico.

We have also argued that the rural development programmes and the present thrust in the implementation even at the cost of aid and policy advice from the international agencies are illfounded. Many studies have shown that rural development programmes, even with ensured and effective participation of the beneficiaries but without radical land reforms have only accentuated the differentiation between the rural rich and the rural poor.

It is against this background that the alternatives provided by the Left Parties particularly CPI and CPI(M) acquire meaning and have to be understood and analysed. The crucial questions that one needs to ask are : How is it that the programmes of the Left Parties continue to include land reforms and mobilization of the landless and the landpoor as one of the main instrumentalities in the realisation of the devised goals? How is it that in the same agrarian situation redistribution of land, security to the tenant cultivator and reasonable wages for agricultural labourers precede any meaningful formulation and implementation of rural development programmes of the Left Parties and receive maximum emphasis? Do they consider land reforms as an end itself or a means to their revolutionary goals of transformation of the socio-economic structure as a whole and achieving a socialist society? How they link the means and ends?

However, there are enough problems even in areas where land reforms have been implemented to a large extent because of the strong left movement and also because the left parties have formed governments with other parties with a common minimum programme of land reforms within the confines of the basic principles of the Indian Constitution. But there, the problems are of a different type and they highlight the limitations of the system in the successful implementation of radical land reform on the one hand and the dilemmas of the left movement on the other (Krishnaji, 1979; Mencher, 1983; Herring, 1983). Academics apart, opposition within the dominant left parties and from other left parties stressing extra-parliamentary struggles has focussed on the dilemmas of the dominant left movement.

As it is, there is a significant difference between the changes that have taken place in the agrarian structure of Kerala and West Bengal both of which have a strong left movement and the changes that have taken place in the Congress ruled states (Laxmi Narayana & Tyagi, 1982). Further, there is not much difference between the changes in congress ruled states and non-Congress-now left states like Tamil Nadu (Guhan, 1983:428-449) and more recently Andhra Pradesh.

Notes

1. For a detailed account of the kind of land reforms and programmes for rural development which the colonial government undertook see Fraser, Government and Politics in W. Bengal (Delhi : Mittal Publications 1979). The reforms recommended by Sir Andrew Fraser were brought out as a report entitled, 'The Administration of Bengal under Sir Andrew Fraser (1905)'. The most interesting of all the measures i.e. tenancy legislation, agricultural extension operation, maintenance of records and experimental and demonstration farms etc. is the formation of 'Agricultural Association' with an intention to promote 'agricultural progress through people themselves' and people meant zamindars and merchants (For further reference in this regard to reforms under the British rule and their impact on the agrarian population see R.P. Dutt (1970:266-275).
2. Three types of co-operatives were created in many parts of India i.e. i) tenant farming and better farming societies ii) collective societies iii) and joint farming societies. The members in first type worked on individual plots and co-operated only in obtaining loans and grants; the members of second type worked collectively on land which they did not own individually and members of the third type had individual ownership of land which was pooled together under joint management (Tai 1974; 237-238). It is said that the co-operative movement as such started from above with the ideas of Gandhi and Nehru rather than with the initiative of the farmers and without any psychological preparation. The major problem, it appears was that there was no intention to involve the farmers and the landless in the reorganisation of the agrarian structure towards an equitable ownership of property on land which alone could change the psychology of both the gainers and losers for co-operative thinking. In the absence of that, which was the main plank of co-operative farming in China, it was naive to expect results from an half hearted move. The initial enthusiasm and support for progressive legislation for ceiling laws and redistribution dwindled as the years passed and as a result the land that was available for co-operativization was extremely limited. To the extent the movement progressed it faced problems of inequality economic, social and political as all kinds of members were admitted i.e. farm labourers, tenants, owner farmers and landlords wherein each member would get benefits according his share in the land. After a field survey Daniel Thorner reported that, "firmly lodged in chief positions of village power today, the dominant families stand ready to seize the lions share of the vast programme of co-operative development. As the peasants say : Jis Ke Pas Jitna Hai, Utna Use Milta Hai (a member will benefit corresponding to what he possesses). Cited in Tai (1974:239).

3. There is a marked difference between the land reforms measures initiated by the Communist Government in Kerala and those initiated by Congress Governments in other states. Firstly, as soon as the Namboodripad government came to power it passed an ordinance forbidding evictions of all sorts which were taking place in all other states. Secondly, the Agrarian Relations Bill provided that the crop sharers and the tenants-at-will be explicitly provided rights on par with the substantial tenants. Most other states did not give security of tenure to these categories. Whereas the laws in other states favoured the rich peasants, in Kerala those who worked on the land were also to be benefited. Thirdly, agricultural labourers could also be considered sharecroppers if their remuneration consisted of a fixed proportion of the produce from the land. Fourthly, whereas in most states landowners could retain most of the land under personal cultivation; which in fact caused mass evictions, in Kerala this right was strictly limited and defined and could even be withheld in the case of any owner who possessed more than 10 acres of double cropped land (Bettleheim, 1968:221-222).

4. As Ronald Herring has put it "the assumption that the bureaucracy constitutes a neutral instrument to be used by the state to act on and change society implies that values can be transmitted directly through the bureaucracy from the legislators. But in fact officials, both high and low, may not share the values in the policy model at all. Even if the values are shared, the concrete interests and social milieu within which the bureaucrat operates may prevent the consolidation of strong and enduring commitment to the reforms goals" (Herring, 1983:39). Not reconstructing the bureaucratic apparatus bequeathed by the Britishers implied this assumption. Yet the negative attitude of the Revenue Officers in the process of implementation has been accounted for in number of studies. One important study in this regard being that of the Planning Commission's Committee on Tenancy Reform which explained the attitude of the Revenue Officers as follows :

After all, ideas about the evolution of tenant's rights as against the landlord have been of a comparatively recent growth. The conception of land as property and the rights and privileges of the owner of the property are deeply rooted. The unconscious resistance of revenue officers to liberal ideas can, therefore, be easily understood. In the case of conflicting evidence there is greater tendency to believe the landlord than the tenant, the presumption being that the poorman is less likely to speak the truth" (cited in Ibid:40)

5. For the details of episodes in the process of implementation of land reforms in Taiwan, Iran and Mexico see Tai (1974:279 passim 286)
6. W. Norman, The United India and Pakistan p.227, vide Thomson Jannuji, Agrarian Crisis in India : The Case of Bihar, New Delhi : Orient Longmans, 1974 p.4.
7. "Gandhi's Interview to a delegation of United Provinces Zamindars", July 1934 Mahratla, August 12, 1934, cited in R.P. Dutt, 1970:628.
8. But under the influence of Socialists inside the Congress and All India Kisan Sabha and partly because he believed only in some coercion on the landed class, Nehru opposed the strategy of class conciliation adopted by Gandhi. His economic philosophy did not suffer from the nostalgia from which Gandhi suffered and he often said that economic freedom of the masses demanded some coercion of vested interests. He wrote in 'Whither India' in 1933 "Congress cannot escape having to answer the question now or later for the freedom of which class or classes in India are we especially striving for? Do we place the masses, the peasantry and workers first, or some small class at the head of our list? In my own mind it is clear that if an indigenous government took the place of a foreign government and kept all the vested interests intact, this would not even be the shadow of freedom". In regard to the way the vested interests were to be divested he wrote : "history shows us that there is no instance of privileged class or group or nation giving up its special privileges or interests willingly Always a measure of class coercion has been applied, pressure has been brought to bear, or conditions have been created which make it impossible or unprofitable for vested interested to carry on." And then the enforced conversion takes place". Cited in Fränkel, (1978:53)
9. See for a succinct note in this regard EPW (May 19, 1973); "Land Reform is Dead, Long Live Land Reform".

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